



# NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Fifty years after their television debut, THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO once again, as International Rescue is relaunched for a whole new generation. Scott Hocking caught up with Weta Workshop head Richard Taylor to find out what we can expect from the new series.

**A** joint venture between ITV Studios and New Zealand's Pukeko Pictures, in collaboration with the world-renowned Weta Workshop FX house, *Thunderbirds Are Go* is a dream project for Weta founder, executive producer and longtime Thunderbirds fan Richard Taylor.

"It's an odyssey that started 12 years ago when I flew to the UK and actually managed to get Gerry Anderson's blessing," he explains. "He didn't know me from a bar of soap, but I went and asked him. He didn't own the rights at that time, but I felt that it was inappropriate to try and pursue it if he didn't give me his blessing. He did. I then managed to take Sylvia Anderson on a date [laughs] and had an amazing evening with her at the London premiere of *The Lord of the Rings*; we became friends and I got her blessing as well."

Taylor agrees that there will inevitably be complaints from hardcore fans about the characters now being CGI, not puppets. But in bringing Thunderbirds to a new audience, it was

important to balance the practicality of the visual effects with the expectations of today's young viewers.

"I'm a passionate animatronics and puppet maker – I'm constantly championing using puppets instead of digital effects. But in a series like this, playing to young children, where you want the Tracy boys to get out in the vehicles and take part in the rescues, the most skilled puppeteering in the world is not going to do that to the level of dynamics and believability that kids need today. There was unfortunately no possibility for us of doing it with puppets, because we just didn't think we could ever get it good enough."

"All of the world is models with digital vehicles and characters. But we have done some pretty unique things to make sure that the vehicles feel model-like, and the models integrate with the digital world. I think people will be pleased to see that the vehicles are not over-polished CG models – they have a real 'model-making' quality to them."

"The heart of the Thunderbirds, even if you only subliminally appreciated it as a kid, is the uncelebrated heroism of those boys, and I just love the thought that we're making a show that represents that to the youth of the world again. When we're all seeking our five minutes of fame these days, it's nice to think there's a show that tells you that you don't need to."

Taylor promises that the storylines for the new episodes will be all new, but expect to see a couple of classics refreshed. "I think people will enjoy seeing much-loved vehicles, like Fireflash, come back," he adds, "and characters we loved to hate in previous episodes coming back as well."

As a longtime Thunderbirds fan and one of the world's best at his craft, Taylor is the perfect man to relaunch the Thunderbirds; his passion for the programme guarantees the new series will be faithful to the original in both look and tone.

"I've never been more anxious about anything we've been involved in because of my deep love of the original and my desperate desire not to upset people like myself," he says. "I'm exactly the right age group for a kid that grew up on Thunderbirds. And the DNA of our company is instigated by the Thunderbirds, so the thought of making something that people didn't appreciate was very concerning to us. But we couldn't have tried harder to make sure we've stayed faithful to that original DNA and bring the best spirit of the original show through."

Such was ITV's faith in the new series, a second season was given the green light before the first had been aired. "I believe it's the first time that ITV have ever done that," Taylor grins. "We feel extraordinarily fortunate – we were doing backflips of joy when we heard that!"

• *Thunderbirds Are Go – Volumes 1 & 2* are out on June 24

